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ABSTRACT

Effective administration of rural school districts is a challenge. Rural administrators must develop, execute, and supervise the total school program. Because administrators must do whatever is necessary to operate the program and support staff frequently are not available, administrative roles and responsibilities are many and varied. Most important, rural administrators must concern themselves with the budget and sound fiscal management. Secondly, administrators must spend time recruiting professional staff and selecting and training non-certified employees. Curriculum development and coordination, including development and operation of federal projects and grants, is a third important responsibility. Other areas are staff evaluation and supervision; district-wide communication; building maintenance, improvement, and design; transportation; food service; and public relations. Work in these areas often detracts from the true administrative process. The best qualified rural administrators have experience, determination, pride, and confidence. They try to base their decisions on sound educational practices and trends and have the ability to do menial tasks when necessary. Rural Kansas Schools have advantages which outweight their disadvantages: relatively few discipline problems, low dropout rate, small class size, considerable respect for teachers and community schools, and good preparation of students for professions or vocations and for adjustment from rural to urban settings. (SB)

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THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF ADMINISTRATORS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

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Development, execution and supervision of the total school program would be my immediate response to a description of the role and responsibility of the rural administrator. Certainly the words all-encompassing or all-inclusive would apply as well because in a small district the chief administrator is expected to fulfill those roles necessary to implement and operate the total school program. This is not a condition of choice. Rather, supportive personnel which can be assigned areas of the school program are not available.

A description of the district I have served for the past fifteen years will illustrate this point. USD #223 is a large rural district that covers 378 square miles. Within the boundaries of the district we have five small towns; Barnes, Hanover, Hollenberg, Linn and Palmer. We have a student population of 731 students. Five hundred twenty are public students. The remaining 211 are parochial elementary students. We have two high schools of 2-A size. Hanover is a high school of 123 students while Linn has 130. Four elementary public schools exist. One is located at Barnes, one at Hanover, one at Linn and one at Palmer. In addition I mention four parochial schools in the district. They must be brought into the picture because of the services we provide for them in the way of transportation, food service, Federal Title programs and the special education mandate. We have 52.4 certified staff and 49.5 supportive paraprofessionals. Distance is a real problem for us. Outside of Linn and Palmer being only six miles apart, the rest of the schools are scattered from one end of the district to the other. The distance between Linn and Hanover is 28 miles. Barnes is centrally located between Linn and Hanover but still we find 14 miles involved between

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each center. When describing the size of USD #223 one can say that it takes in one-third of Washington County.

When I first assumed the superintendency thirteen years ago, the district was in a state of turmoil. The board was going through a superintendent about every six months; five separate and sovereign communities were adjusting to being placed in the same administrative unit and our educational program had just about ground to a halt. I was asked to take the position and I was assured of the support of the board and a majority of the communities. Stepping into this situation I asked the question, "What is it going to take to make things go?" The first answer to this question centered around making the most effective use out of our administrative staff. A plan was developed that called for the assignment of a principal officer to be assigned at each major center. One principal was assigned to the Hanover center and one was assigned to the Linn center. Their responsibilities would be centered around supervision of our K-12 program. The third administrator would then be left with the supervision of Barnes and Palmer elementary schools as well as those responsibilities of the central office. The board would not consider any expansion of this staff. We were to operate with a three-man administrative team.

The second and most important answer to the above question centered around a definition of the areas of responsibility that had to be fulfilled so that the district could function and the teachers placed in an environment where they could teach. I arrived at the conclusion that organization and leadership had to be provided in the following areas:

Budget	Physical Plant	Food Service
Staff recruitment	Curriculum development	Transportation
Evaluation and Supervision	Communication	Public Relations

I then approached the position from the standpoint that these areas must become the major responsibilities of the central administrator. One fact became very apparent. It would be nice to assign staff recruitment to someone. It would be nice to assign curriculum to someone but there was no one remaining. I had to approach the position with the understanding that these areas had to be served effectively if the district was to function and that the central office had to provide the leadership and organization. I now realize that the position in which I found myself was not unique. In our rural Kansas districts many of my colleagues are faced with the same areas of responsibility. District size severely limits the number of administrative positions available yet, the areas of responsibility are comparable to the larger district. An administrator's effectiveness in a rural district is dependent upon how well he is able to react to the large number of areas that must be served. At this point of the discussion the conclusion must be drawn and emphasis placed on the fact that work must be done in areas that detract from the true administrative purpose because there is no one that possesses the authority, experience or training other than the administrator.

Therefore, it is proper now to examine the role and responsibility of the rural administrator. In our discussion above I highlighted key areas that had to be met if a district was to function. One of the most important of these areas is the budget. When we consider most unified district budgets are over one million dollars for a school year and when the eighteen months provision is included and Federal and State programs are included, this exceeds two million dollars. A two million dollar operation requires a sound fiscal plan. The superintendent has to be the budget developer as well as the fiscal manager throughout the budget year. To make certain this responsibility is met, I draw a budget message which is a financial blueprint of the year's operation. We also have developed a series of departmental budgets

that help define spending by the staff. Without such a plan I can see trouble developing for the administrator.

When talking about the budget I must also again mention the role of budget manager during the rest of the year. Before I became superintendent a situation existed in our district where the board was under the impression that it had $47,000.00 to spend for equipment and teacher requisitions. When all encumbrances were in they had less than $10,000.00. I have found that the board was reassured when he had responsibility in accounting and that they were not hesitant to purchase needed items if they knew where the money was coming from.

Once the budget is drawn I rely heavily upon the paraprofessional. In our office we have a staff position charged with bookkeeping and processing orders and requisitions. We have a second charged with payroll, social security, etc. These two office positions are guided by the board's clerk who in turn reports periodically to me. A new feature involved in fiscal management is to watch cash flow. Since idle fund interest exceeds ten percent, we have to invest these funds. I watch this and am responsible in recommending to the board revenue producing steps. When discussing responsibility, the budget preparation and fiscal management has to have a top priority.

The second most important responsibility of the rural administrator is staff recruitment or employment of both certified and non-certified personnel. This is a key role as well as a time consuming one. We realize that we are as good as our people. Therefore, time spent in this area pays huge dividends. It would be nice to turn this area over to a personnel director but as I have said, none are available. Therefore in the spring of the year we must hit the road. During the days of teacher surplus I could fill our positions and not leave the office. This no longer is true. We must appear

on campus and otherwise beat the bushes to fill our positions. Our turnover will run from eight to eighteen people. This does require a great deal of time but I must stress the importance of staff employment.

Equally as important is maintaining our non-certified staff members. Our labor force is somewhat limited due to our small rural population. However, the area schools seem to provide an attractive work station which results in a degree of selection. All contracts must be approved by the board of education but it is the superintendent that must make the choice and then recommend. I feel a large part of my evaluation is the people that are placed in our schools. A responsibility connected with this area is the training of the paraprofessional. I have found that many times it is the superintendent that must train the new staff member because he is the only one that possesses the understanding of what must be done and how to do it.

A third area of priority comes in the area of curriculum coordination and development. Much of the work is done by the principals and teachers but the general coordination must come from the central office. I have taken part in a number of citizens and parent's advisory committee meetings and one outcome that frequently is stressed is that our people look to the professional to develop curriculum. We are to be the leaders in this area. As such, a period of our school calendar must be devoted to curriculum. It would be nice to have a curriculum coordinator but in his absence this role falls on the superintendent. One could easily ignore this part of the responsibility but I do not feel it is proper to be completely void of curriculum work or curriculum content. Included in this responsibility is the development and operation of Federal projects, Title I, Title IV B and various special grants that exist from time to time. In the last five years administrators in the field have been faced with the development of an entire special education curriculum in order to comply with the special education mandate. In addition

to the normal work in the curricular area special education has represented a large effort. I feel that my philosophy towards this subject is that one must not get so engrossed with business that he loses sight of the curriculum. This has to be a major area of an administrators responsibility no matter the level of administration.

A related area is that of evaluation and supervision. Our board policy dictates that the superintendent may enter into evaluation of teachers where warranted and in addition, is the main supervisor of non-certified personnel. First in the area of evaluation, recent due process laws and teacher tenure have created a situation where concern must be given to the evaluation instrument as well as procedure. Having been involved in three due process hearings for a nonrenewal of a tenured teacher in which we have won each case, you must have developed a thorough understanding of the inadequaces of the teacher. Even though principals are charged with the evaluation of teachers in their buildings still in a due process hearing, it is the superintendent that must present the board's case. On the other hand, from time to time there is the defense of the good teacher. When confronted with this situation facts about the teacher's ability is a great ally. When questions arise about the teacher the first contact is many times made with the superintendent. Therefore, this area constitutes a major responsibility.

The role of day to day supervision of non-certified people is another important area of responsibility. In this area one must be careful not to usurp the role of the principal in his building. I feel that a major effort in supervision is supporting the decisions of principals as much as direct supervision of non-certified. As mentioned before, I feel a large measure of supervision is involved in training new people. Having properly trained cooks, custodians, bus drivers and aides determines their success in the schools.

Another area of responsibility is in the area of communications. There must be a coordinated effort of informing faculty and staff of events or developments. With over one hundred people serving the district in their various roles there has to be an effort made to direct activity through communication. We have developed a weekly memo to faculty and staff that is published every Saturday and ready for distribution Monday morning. In addition to faculty and staff, we mail this to area clergy and any other person geared to serving the youth of our area. I will not spend a great deal of time on this subject other than to say communication with faculty and staff is all important and rests largely with the central office.

Another major area of responsibility is in the area of building maintenance, improvement and even design. In the present inflationary period I feel the district administrator must be concerned about the physical plant. When there is an equipment breakdown or a leaking roof the educational program can be seriously altered. In addition, costs in these areas have skyrocketed. These areas cannot be left to chance. I feel the wise administrator is going to develop a program of preventive maintenance where there is replacement of equipment on a regular basis and annual building maintenance. Still, no matter how hard you try with all of our buildings, breakdowns are going to occur. The administrator must have the ability to deal with these problems and effectively keep them running. I have also included design in this area of discussion. Given a period of tenure you are going to be involved with remodeling or even building. I have been in positions where even though an architect has been employed, I have been called upon to say what to do here or there. This places the administrator in the position where he must keep up with building materials, practices and trends, limited though it might be. He also must know where to turn for repairs. At this point in time every administrator must be concerned about energy efficient

buildings from the standpoint of conservation. This condition is placing us in an area where we need to itensify study as well as to visit with consultants about fuel reduction, etc. We also have to be very careful not to be taken in by gadgets. Many untried products are on the market today backed by very flowery advertisement. It has been my experience that the board and faculty look to the administration when problems in this area develop. We have to have the ability and knowledge to arrive at the problem and seek proper solutions. Therefore, boiler pressure, steam traps and cut-off valves have to be a ready part of our vocabulary.

I now move into areas which one might term nuisance areas of administration but because of their importance one must give attention to them. These are the areas of transportation and food service. If a student misses the bus or if the meals are substandard, I feel you are dealing with a more emotional parent than one where problems exist with the educational program. The very size of these programs will indicate their importance and need for attention. Food service now has a budget of over $125,000.00. Transportation is a budget item where one quarter of a million dollars will be spent. Because of their size attention has to be given to them.

Our food service program has expanded over the years to where we serve or cater to parochial schools as well as to serve as a base kitchen for meals on wheels for the aged. This is an area where effective administration must be practiced so that there is proper filing of claims for Federal and State reimbursement. At the same time one cannot afford to spend a great deal of time in this area. To gauge the size of our program we serve 650-700 meals daily.

We have taken steps to make the lunch operation efficient. Since three kitchens are involved, we have attempted to coordinate our daily effort. We purchase wholesale with items delivered to a central storage area at Barnes.

Kitchens then requisition from this central storage. We have been able to designate one person as our Food Purchasing Agent. We noticed that we had one head cook who was very energetic and efficient. We reasoned that this person was capable of additional responsibility so the designation was made. This is an example of attempting to use our people in the most productive manner. A concluding statement I would make about food service is that it is an area where the administrator must examine in order to see that all needs are being met. It is also an area where a great deal of delegating may be done.

Transportation is another area of concern. Steps must be taken to see that the fleet operates safely and that there is no waste or inefficiency. Since our district covers 378 square miles our fleet must be large. Our district owns thirty seven vehicles in the form of big buses, carryalls, vans and cars. There has to be the coordination of the fleet because thirty of these vehicles are involved in the transportation of students. We have no transportation supervisor or mechanic. We rely on our drivers for attention to maintenance. We assign our buses to service stations and mechanics. We try to create the impression with our service people that this is your bus. As taxpayers you are part owner. Help us to make it run safely and efficiently. We also evaluate our drivers on how well they care for the buses. Weekly I set a goal of talking to five drivers about their buses as well as the service station involved. We are fortunate in that our board has the philosophy not to spare anything in regards to the fleet. We try and purchase two large buses and two carryalls each year so that we maintain an up-to-date fleet. My experience in this area is that preventive maintenance makes the bus safer as well as to operate more economically.

Our central office is charged with coordination of the bus fleet. I have lived in the area so long that I know where everyone lives. It is very

easy for me to make up bus routes or discuss road problems due to this knowledge of the area. We also keep a monthly breakdown on the cost of each bus. By going over this study, I can spot problem areas and solve problems before they become serious. In the rural Kansas district transportation is a major concern. Perhaps the hardest decision one is forced to make is to decide whether or not to hold school during winter-snowy conditions. Since the decision must be made before six o'clock in the morning, one gets the feeling he is stabbing in the dark. Our district is so large that it is possible to have a blizzard at one end of the district and light snow in the other. To further complicate matters, one group of patrons feel that if snow is on the road, school should be called off. The other group feels that weather should never cause a school closing. The chief administrative officer has to make the final decision. Because of its importance transportation must be a concern of the rural administrator. It is an area that cannot be slighted yet one must be careful not to spend too much time in this area of the school program. With proper organization, it can be handled by the rural administrator.

A final area of responsibility is that of public relations. This is a very weak area of mine. Nevertheless, it is the role of the administrator to project the school into the community. Admittedly, I do not spend enough time in this area. I do have allies in the local publishers. They will print every article we present; usually with front page coverage. I make it a practice to write a detailed explanation of our board meetings. Likewise, strong athletic programs are a very big help also. Another public relations tool I use in the rural district is to be around. I try and spend time in each town weekly and it is expected that the superintendent attend most, if not all, of the area social functions. I mention public relations because of

its importance to the school and it is in an area of responsibility of the rural administrator.

Therefore, I have covered the major areas of responsibility that an administrator faces in a rural district. I suppose that one would say that many areas mentioned are non-administrative in nature. Someone else could easily do them. However--stop and think--at least in our situation there is no one else. When faced with the problem of making a district run, attention must be given to the areas mentioned. I have done everything over the past thirteen years from scrubbing urinals to outlining a two million dollar financial operation. In the rural area there are times where the administrator is the only one with the expertise necessary to accomplish a task necessary to make things run.

What would be the best training and preparation for such a position? My first answer is experience. When I was placed in my present position, I had been in the area as a teacher, coach and principal. I pretty well could answer the question of what would it take to make a district run. A second qualification that is necessary is to have the ability and the determination to do the meanial tasks when the necessity arises. Throughout this paper I have stressed the fact that times develop when you must meet a need and the only one left to do it is the administrator. A rural administrative position should be taken with that understanding. Determination is another necessary qualification. I have been on a one year contract for years. Each year I enter into the position with the idea that I might only last one year but that during that time I am going to serve as the chief administrative officer of the district.

Another trait necessary for successful administration is to attempt to make your decisions on sound educational practices and trends. I attempt to attend as many seminars, workshops and or college classes as I can. I feel

we constantly have to look for new ways of doing things or better ways of approaching problems. To those of you that are students, I say attempt to absorb as much theory and material as you find possible because of its application potential for you in the future. Another important necessary ingredient is a feeling of pride in being in the educational profession. This feeling creates a respect for our fellow teachers and creates the desire to do as much for them as we possibly can.

A final qualification is one that is difficult to express. There are times when an administrator is confronted with a situation where the best and proper answer is I don't know. There are other times when one would be confronted with a situation where he did not know what was going on--but no one was going to know he did not know. I feel that what I am trying to say is that one must not be hesitant to meet a problem and to do everything in his power to attempt to arrive at a solution. It may be summarized by saying that you must possess confidence in your ability.

What kind of job are we doing in rural Kansas schools? Perhaps there is the feeling that rural Kansas school districts are substandard. I have never felt this. In fact, I serve USD #223 by choice. I have had several opportunities to move to large systems. However, I have chosen the rural area and it was that environment that I wanted my daughters brought up in. Even though we are rural and small, there are advantages. We enjoy a relative calm situation as far as discipline is concerned. Very little of my time is spent in this area. We live in an area where there is considerable respect for the teacher as well as community schools in general. The end effect of this is that it produces a good educational climate. A second area of advantage is our small class size. We have a condition where teacher can teach. I point to our graduates. We have produced doctors, lawyers, teachers, administrators, veterinarians, successful farmers and small business men. We

can also think of skilled craftsmen that have been produced. Perhaps I am egotistical when I say I feel we do quite well. We prepare the student for the professions or vocations as well as tc prepare him for the adjustment many have to make from going from rural to urban settings. We also point to the fact that our dropout rate is very low. A dropout is most unusual in the rural area. It would not be fair if I did not allude to problems. We have our deficiencies and problems not found in large districts. Still it is my feeling that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

In conclusion, I close this paper with select words just as I started. The most appropriate word I can develop to describe being an administrator in the rural area is to say that it is a "Challenge".

Mr. Dale Carlson received his B.A. and M.A. from Kansas State University. He is presently superintendent of USD #223.